

NOTES ON THE SPECIES-PAIR *CIS FESTIVUS* PANZ.
AND *C. VESTITUS* MELL. (COL.: CISIDAE)

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MANY of us have probably found that this pair of closely-allied species can be puzzling to discriminate with certainty. From a recent thorough overhaul of my material, points arise with respect to both recognition and relative incidence, which appear worthy of notice.

Diagnosis

In an examination of synonymic problems among the British species of *Cis*, the late D.K. Kevan (1967) published a key to these two species and *C. pygmaeus* Marsh. (pp. 140-2) with further notes and some helpful figures. Based (presumably) on ample material in the Royal Scottish Museum collection, it could fairly have been expected to be the last word on the subject. However, I find some of the characters given for the separation of the present pair less than satisfactory as stated — valuable as the paper undoubtedly is overall.

Looking over the very full and detailed key to the two species and the figures of pronota etc., one receives a confident impression that the separation should be straightforward, even easy; yet with the actual insects before one it can be a different matter, and such confidence may rather soon evaporate! It is almost as though the author had not fully grasped the wide range of variation shown by *C. vestitus*, not only in colour but also in size, degree of dullness of pronotum, etc, compared with the relatively stable *C. festivus*. This would be understandable if he had been working with a small number only of the former species, but nothing is said regarding the extent of the material on which the key was based.

In all this I of course refer to externals alone; the male characters, both primary and secondary (abdominal), differ a little in the two species, but — apart from their limitation to one sex — their use is hardly practical for set specimens of such small fragile beetles. They are well figured by Kevan (p. 141).

Perhaps the best single criterion I have been able to find is one included by Kevan (alone of British authors) in his key, but with qualification; whereas both Lohse (1967: 293) and Hansen (1951: 150, 158) give it prominence as a leading character, which it appears to deserve. It concerns the fringe of raised and somewhat reflexed scales on the front margin of the pronotum. In *C. festivus* this fringe is well-developed, plainly longer than that on the side-borders; in *C. vestitus* on the other hand it is shorter than the lateral fringes, often indistinct or virtually absent. This feature is best examined from the side and a little from behind, and is a most useful means of distinction in doubtful cases. It should be considered in conjunction

with others as far as possible, but is probably alone almost determinative.

Well-developed and typical specimens of *festivus* (males in particular) have a distinctive facies, appearing rather stouter and a trifle less elongate, the pronotal side-borders more expanded and rounded basally where they are slightly or evidently wider than in *vestitus*; the width across them, in the male, almost exceeding that of the elytra — a point well made by Fowler (1890: 210).

The diagnostic value of pronotal microsculpture appears limited, though used by Joy (1932: 557) and stressed by Kevan. It is said to be nearly absent in *festivus*, but is quite visible throughout (even if weak) in my few examples of that species. Consequently, while strong reticulation indicates *vestitus*, weak reticulation is ambiguous. Also, body-colour varies more in the last-named than Kevan seems to allow for, as does that of the antennal club to some extent. However, a dark (even slightly darkened) club points strongly to *vestitus*, and so does a dark upperside and small size; in *festivus* the club is always pale and the dorsal surface always brown, never blackish.

Relative incidence

Here a surprising fact emerges: the consensus among authors is that *festivus* is decidedly the less rare of the two, yet I can in no way reconcile this view with my own experience spread over some 60 years — as will appear below. Kevan expresses no opinion; Fowler (1890) notes *festivus* as “not common” and gives it a range from southern England to the Scottish Highlands, and *vestitus* as rare with much fewer scattered localities up to Teesdale (pp. 210, 211). Lohse (1967: 293), under *vestitus**, states that it is (in mid-Europe) much rarer than *festivus* (which latter he associates with fungi of the genus *Stereum*). Joy (1932: 557) marks both species as rare, giving a similar distribution to Fowler with the addition of two Irish provinces for *festivus*. Local lists tend to lack both species. Of modern county lists I shall take but one as representative, namely that for Gloucestershire (Atty, 1983: 82). This lists *festivus* only, from fungi on willows: three records, two of single specimens and one of six, the latest 1921.

For contrast with the foregoing, it will be instructive to list concisely, in chronological order, my finds of each species, together with a few others in my collection (placed last):—

C. festivus: Brockenhurst, New Forest, SH, off aspen, 22.v.35; Ruislip Woods, MX, under bark of stump, 8.v.48; Epping Forest, SE, off birch, 11.vi.50; New Forest, 9.vi.14 (probably *ex* D. Sharp). All single specimens.

C. vestitus: Chilham, EK, polypori on elm, 17.viii.31; Ridge Way near

*I take the opportunity to correct an error of attribution here: Lohse writes that *vestitus* is regularly beaten from oak branches in summer in England, but the species in question is really *pygmaeus*.

Eastnor, HF, two by beating, viii.36; Aviemore, EI, polypori on spruce and pine, vi, vii.38; Ham Street Woods, EK, old oak boughs, 7.v.50; Blean Woods, EK, ditto, 13.ix.50; Savernake Forest, NW, bracket fungi on beech, a colony, 10.vi.60; Greenwich Park, WK, small polypori on elm, c.1964; Blackheath, WK, ditto on beech, a colony, 26.vi.71; Shooters Hill, WK, two swept under oaks, 2.vii.83; ditto, small fungi on pine log, 17.vi.85; Hartlebury, WO, beech, 27.ii.28, G.H. Ashe; ditto, fungus, xi.28; Nethy Bridge, EI, 15.v.46, *id.*; Colyton, SD, flood refuse, 4.xii.52, *id.*; Lower Beeding, WX, xi.30, H. Dinnage; Haywards Heath, EX, xi.33, *id.*

Conclusion

The above records speak for themselves; the problem is to account for the huge disparity they show, in the light of what has been said. Subject to the experience of other collectors being not too different, I can only regard *C. festivus* as very rare for a long time past, and *C. vestitus* as (now at all events) widespread and far from uncommon. Errors of identification may have been frequent in earlier times, and many specimens formerly passing as *festivus* may perhaps have been *vestitus*; some of the collectors who supplied records to Fowler could well have misunderstood the two species. This alone, however, can hardly be the whole story. Rather, what seems to have happened is that the status of the two species in Britain (but not in mid-Europe, *teste* Lohse) has undergone a radical shift during the past half-century or more, *festivus* becoming very much rarer as *vestitus* increased correspondingly. No reason can be offered for such a pronounced reversal, but several parallel cases could be adduced — our two species of the longicorn genus *Molorchus*, for instance. The descriptive term “see-saw effect” might be an apt one to apply to this phenomenon.

References

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The earliest British capture of *Cis dentatus* Mell. (Col.: Cisidae); with diagnostic notes.

Having lately had occasion to re-examine a specimen of *Cis* from the duplicate boxes of G.H. Ashe, which I (and doubtless he too) had failed to recognise, I was reminded by its data (Loch Garten, Inv., 3.vii.1946) that